

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 75

Halifax, 29 March 2009

Q. 75 What is sanctification?

A. Sanctification is a work of God's grace, whereby they whom God has, before the foundation of the world, chosen to be holy, are in time, through the powerful operation of His Spirit applying the death and resurrection of Christ unto them, renewed in their whole man after the image of God; having the seeds of repentance unto life, and all other saving graces, put into their hearts, and those graces so stirred up, increased, and strengthened, as that they more and more die unto sin, and rise unto newness of life.

Introduction:

In question 69, we began looking at the wonderful communion in grace we have with Jesus Christ in this life...

- Through faith, we are given a whole array of marvellous benefits—
 - And these are the benefits that are given to us now—in this life...
 - There are even more benefits waiting for us at death, but we are looking at the ones we obtain as soon as we come to Jesus Christ.
- We spent four weeks looking at the first of these: justification.
 - Justification is foundational to all the rest!
 - I showed you that God has provided a way to justify sinners without any injustice!
 - He has made a way to declare that we are righteous even though we are not righteous.
 - And that is by imputing to us the righteousness of His Son,
 - who for us and for our salvation was crucified to pay the penalty of our sin,
 - and who fulfilled for us, in His obedience, all that was required for eternal life.
 - God fully accepts as righteous all those who believe on the Lord Jesus.
 - There is no more condemnation for them.
 - They have fulfilled all that God requires of them through Jesus Christ.
 - This is the benefit called **justification**.

The second benefit we took up last week.

- It is called **adoption**.
 - While justification is foundational to all the benefits, adoption is the highest of all the benefits—the one that is the greatest privilege.
 - For in adoption, the LORD actually takes those who were once sinful rebels, wholly defiled in body and spirit, and makes them His very own children!
 - We are not even worthy to be His servants...
 - Even if we had never fallen into sin, we would not be worthy to be His servants!
 - But God has made us His sons!
 - As sons, we have a whole array of benefits and privileges!
 - We are secure in His love forever—never to be rejected...
 - We are trained up by Him in the ways of His household...
 - We are given many brothers and sisters whom He has also adopted...
 - We are given free and familiar access to Him...
 - We are given an everlasting inheritance as heirs with Jesus Christ.
 - There is no benefit to compare with this.
 - But it is time for us to move along to the third benefit...

The third benefit (which we will begin looking at today) is sanctification.

- If justification is the most foundational of all the benefits, and adoption is the greatest of them all, we might say that sanctification is the most beautifying of all...
 - for it has to do with the changing of our character.
- In short, sanctification is that work that God does in us over time of changing us more and more into what He has called us to be.
 - Sanctification is the Spirit's work of setting us apart from sin to God.
 - This is the actual moulding and shaping of our character, the transformation of our persons:
 - from rebels against God to servants of God...
 - from those who are ignorant of God to those who know God...
 - from those who hate God to those who love God...

Romans 6 is a chapter in the Bible that treats sanctification at large.

- Listen now, as I read to you from Romans 6:1-23
- READ> Romans 6:1-23

I. Paul shows that sanctification has a definite starting point.

A. This starting point is a radical change that takes place all at once.

1. This initial sanctification is sometimes called definitive sanctification since it is definite rather than gradual.
 - a. It is also called the new birth, regeneration, being made alive, the first resurrection, the circumcision of the heart, the baptism of the Spirit, etc.
 - b. Definitive sanctification is when your direction is completely changed...
 - from rebelling against God to serving God.
 - You head out in a whole new direction toward God instead of away from God.
 - And you are given the seed of true spiritual life that can never be extinguished.
2. In Romans 6, Paul describes this definitive change as occurring when we are baptised into Jesus Christ.
 - a. We looked at this some when we looked at effectual calling.
 - **Romans 6:1-4: What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.**
 - The idea is that you are merged or joined together with Jesus Christ...
 - That's what it means to be baptised into Him.
 - You are engrafted into Him and so made alive by His Spirit so that you are able to live and bring forth fruit for God.
 - You are connected to Him the way a branch is connected to a vine.
 - b. This joining together with Him is a baptism into His death...
 - you are joined to His death in such a way that you are actually no longer what you were...
 - you die to what you were—
 - He puts to death the old man.
 - And you are said to be raised from the dead because of the new life you obtain from Him.

B. Paul insists here that when you have died and been raised with Christ, you cannot be the same.

1. Verse 4 shows that you are raised in order that you might walk in newness of life.
 - a. He is not just saying that this is done so that the *opportunity* will be opened to us to walk in newness of life...
 - Walking in newness of life is the inevitable outcome of being united to Christ's resurrection.
 - He is saying that as surely as Christ rose from the dead, we shall walk in newness of life.
 - This certainty of the connection is further confirmed in v. 5:
 - **Rom 6:5: For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness* of His resurrection,**
 - b. It is wrong to assume that because our justification is not based on anything in us, we can continue in sin.
 - That's what some people say when they hear the doctrine of justification taught...
 - They say, "if you believe that, you can keep on sinning because your salvation is not based on what you do anyway."
 - c. But Paul is arguing that it is not possible for a person who has been born again to continue as he was.
 - The person who believes in Christ has been given new life...
 - and that life will be busy and active in Him...
 - It cannot be dormant and inert because it is life...
 - It is not that you **must** live differently in order to be accepted by God...
 - it is that you **will** live differently because you are radically changed.
 - You can't be alive and still live as a dead man.
 - When Lazarus was raised from physical death,
 - he began to breathe and his heart began to beat.
 - His breathing and his heart beat is not what made him alive,
 - but since he was alive, the breathing and the heart beating were there.
 - The new life shows itself with the signs of life.
2. Not only are we raised to walk in newness of life, but we are also:
 - **v. 6 "crucified with Christ in order that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin."**
 - a. There is here a change of masters that takes place.

- We have a new master to rule us now...because we died to the old master.
 - You can't be in Christ if the old master is still alive.
 - You have a whole new direction and orientation now.
 - Before, God was not your master...
 - You did **nothing** for Him because you were serving another.
 - But now you have been released from the old master and are no longer serving him...
 - You have been brought to God to serve Him.
- b. This does not mean that you are perfect and never sin any more.
- 1) But what it does mean is that you sin as a servant to God... not as a servant to sin.
 - Another way to say it is that even though you sin, you still are Christ's servant.
 - You sin **in your service** to God, which is quite different than serving sin.
 - 2) Let me see if I can illustrate this...
 - Suppose you work for a bank robber...
 - Everything you do in your work is for this bank robber.
 - It is all against the bank.
 - But then suppose you have a complete change in your life and you stop serving the bank robber and go to work for the bank.
 - And suppose you are a sincere employee or servant there!
 - *Now* everything you do is **for** the bank—but that does not mean that everything you do will be good...
 - One day you may be lazy, but you are still serving the bank albeit in a lazy way; you are not serving the robber...
 - Another day you may make a foolish decision that will harm the bank, but still, you are serving the bank rather than the bank robber.
 - So it is that when you are no longer a servant of sin, you are free from sin altogether as your master...
 - Sin is not your master and never will be again—it will never have dominion over you again.
 - Now you are a servant of God and have been brought into His house to do His will.
 - You are consciously alive to Him, and have come to serve Him.

C. All of this comes to us through the virtue of Christ.

1. The reason you are dead to sin and alive to God is because you are joined to Jesus Christ.

- He has already died to sin for us so that when we are joined to Him, the break has already been made.
 - There is instant death to sin when you believe.
- Jesus brings this new life to you...this life that He secured when He died for you on the cross.
 - He purchased your liberation from this old master (that is, He redeemed you) by giving His life as a ransom...
 - And so now there is no more death for us because we are brought into His death.
 - This is what Paul is talking about in verses 8-10.
 - **Rom 6:8-10: Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For *the death* that He died, He died to sin once for all; but *the life* that He lives, He lives to God.**

2. It is sort of like this—

- Here we are with this master called sin...
 - Jesus comes along and takes that master and goes to the cross with him and dies with him.
 - The result is, our old master is dead because Jesus killed him.
 - As a judgement to Adam, he was delivered into the bondage of sin and Jesus breaks the bondage by His death—
 - thus freeing us from this terrible master.

3. This death became effective for you as soon as you believed...

- That is what verses 17-18 are referring to.
 - **Romans 6:17-18: But God be thanked that *though* you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.**
- When we came to Jesus, He took us by the hand and led us to a new master—righteousness—which master we now serve.
 - This is definitive sanctification—the point at which sanctification begins.

TRANS> But what is it like once we have believed and this change of masters has occurred?

- From **definitive sanctification**, we move into what is called **progressive sanctification**.
- Progressive sanctification is something God does over time—little by little—
 - It is the result of the change of masters...
 - Our new master begins to train us to serve Him.
 - He teaches you how to live in His house...
 - He teaches us to observe all things that He has commanded.

II. In Romans 6, Paul describes what your attitude should be about this change of masters.

A. First, he says that we must recognise that we have a new master.

- **Romans 6:11: Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**
1. You need to realise that you are now serving God and not your old master.
 - You need to know that you have been enlisted into *His* service.
 - You must, therefore, learn new ways of doing things.
 - a. Many of the old ways were so ingrained in you that it is easy to fall right back into them again without even thinking about it...
 - Out slips the lie—a thing your new master forbids...
 - There comes the adulterous glance—another thing your new master forbids...
 - And now the gossip begins...
 - b. You have to keep remembering that you are not serving the old master anymore.
 - It is futile for you to be trying to please him, because he is gone.
 - What will it profit you to do his work now?
 - Besides, the way of your new master is so much better!
 2. It is necessary to understand that you have new master because **you** are involved in your sanctification.
 - a. It is not that you sanctify yourself; for it is God who works in you to change your character—but He does not do this apart from your co-operation.
 - Now be sure you don't misunderstand what I am saying here.

- I don't mean that we change ourselves,
 - God is at work in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure.
 - But what I am saying is that the doing is truly ours.
 - My great aunt fell and broke her hip when she was 103 years old.
 - They gave her a hip replacement and within a week, she was able to walk again.
 - The doctor was the one who worked in her, but she (not the doctor) is the one who is walking around.
- b. The theological term that is used to describe our cooperation with God in sanctification is *concursum*.
- 1) Some people see the Spirit's work in us as possession.
 - They think the Spirit comes and takes you over—
 - They think that you relinquish control to Him so that you no longer act, but He acts in you.
 - People who think this way will sometimes talk about “letting God take over their lives,”
 - or “letting Him love” others through them.
 - But that is not what God does when He sanctifies us...
 - He does not love through us, but rather teaches us and enables us to love.
 - It is *concursum*, not possession.
 - 2) When my children bring me a jar to open, I have pointed out to them that I am not like the Holy Spirit when He helps them...
 - I cannot do what the Holy Spirit does when they come for help...
 - I can open the jar for them (most of the time), but the Holy Spirit would enable **them** to open the jar—
 - He does not serve God for us, but He enables us to serve God ourselves!
 - That is a much grander thing than just doing it for us.
 - 3) But this does not mean that sanctification is mere self-effort either...
 - It is not that you just have to keep trying harder and taking a lot of deep breaths to grow more like Christ...

- You are dependent on God's grace to transform you through His word and sacraments...
- Because He is working in you, there is hope for you to grow.

TRANS> So you see that sanctification is neither something that God does apart from us, nor is it something that we do in our own strength.

B. This being so, you must not think that sanctification occurs when you just sit around and wait for the Spirit to change you.

- There is something for you to do, and Paul tells you what that something is in verses 12-13.
- **Rom 6:12-13: Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God.**

1. Since you are God's servant now, you are to present yourself to Him...

- This is not a passive thing, but a very active thing...
- Don't sit around waiting to be zapped—
 - That happened when you changed masters!
 - Now you are to present your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

2. How do you present yourself to God like this?

- a. First of all, you have to come to be taught of Him—you have to learn what His will is so that you will know what He expects of you.
 - This comes about by studying God's word,
 - and by listening to the preaching of His word.
 - and by trying to understand how to apply it in your life.
 - You will not be a very good servant if you don't know what your master's will is!
 - And let me say at this point—it is not the things that God has not revealed that you need to focus on—but the things He has!
 - Some people are more focused about the will of God as far as where they should live or which dress they should buy...
 - But what you need to be concerned about is learning to observe all things that He has commanded in His word.
 - You will find that there is plenty to keep you busy if you do that!

- b. Of course, as you learn what God wants you to do, the next thing is to begin doing it.
 - In presenting yourself as an instrument of righteousness, you are to begin to love others as Christ loved them, to serve them faithfully and cheerfully, to worship God according to His commandments, and so forth.
 - All the while you are to look to God to give you the strength to do these things for Him.
 - He has brought you into His house, and it is His responsibility to feed you and comfort you.
 - Jesus gives us His flesh and blood to eat and drink so that we might obtain virtue from Him to live the new life that God calls us to live.

TRANS> Without this presenting of your members as instruments for obedience, there cannot be any sanctification...

C. If there is not this presenting of your members for obedience,

- it indicates that you are not really God's servants.
- This is brought out in verse 15-16.
- **Romans 6:15-16: What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin *leading* to death, or of obedience *leading* to righteousness?**

1. This is quite a simple and obvious principle...

- If you want to find out whose servant somebody is, just watch to see who they obey.
- If they claim that they are under the grace of God,
 - and that they are justified by faith and not works...
 - but they are still presenting themselves as slaves of unrighteousness,
 - what would make anything think that person had been set free from his old master?
 - He is not serving the new master he claims, so something is wrong with his claim.

2. In spite of this clear teaching, there are some who, in zeal to protect God's grace, claim that there can be justification without sanctification.

- a. They teach that there are two types of Christians: the carnal Christian and the spiritual Christian.
 - This teaching is found in dispensationalism and in Roman Catholicism.

- It is very dangerous because it makes people think that after they have performed some act, they are right with God...
 - for dispensationalists, that act is praying to receive Christ...
 - for Roman Catholics, it is the sacraments.
- b. Such persons are obviously not presenting themselves as servants to Christ, yet they consider themselves to be righteous before God...
 - But Paul shows where they will end up...
 - “you are slaves of the one you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness.”

TRANS> and this leads to the next point, namely that:

III. Sanctification is a process (it doesn't all happen at once).

A. In verse 19, Paul brings out the progressive nature of sanctification as well as of sin:

- **Rom 6:19: I speak in human *terms* because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members *as* slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness *leading* to *more* lawlessness, so now present your members *as* slaves of righteousness for holiness.**
- 1. When you present yourselves to God to obey Him or to follow righteousness, it brings about holiness or sanctification.
 - In other words, you start to become more and more like Jesus Christ.
 - A servant who follows his master will begin more and more to please his master...
 - And that which pleases God is that which is holy and righteous.
 - It is that which is free from sin and imperfection.
- 2. The idea here is that as you present service to God, you become better and better at serving Him—and that is what holiness is—
 - It is when you are more and more set apart to God and His ways—it is when you become more and more like Jesus Christ.

B. Paul goes on to show that the old way was moving you along to death—

1. You were completely free from righteousness
 - **Rom 6:20: For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness**
 - Everything you did was for the wrong master, nothing was for God. You were free from righteousness.

- Remember the bank robber illustration.
2. And so he asks, “What fruit did you have in those things of which you are now ashamed?”
 - What benefit did you obtain from your sinful ways?
 - It was simply the path to death...
 - There you were, toiling away to serve your fleshly desires and conceit...
 - And to what benefit?—death!
 - If you have been born again, you can see the folly of your old ways...
 - It is something you are ashamed of now!
 3. On the other hand, the path you are on if you have been set free in Christ is the fruit of sanctification which leads to eternal life.
 - This does not mean that you earn eternal life by serving God...
 - But it does mean that you are on the path to eternal life when you are serving Him and becoming more and more holy.
 - You can tell that someone is moving toward spending eternity in God’s house when you see them serving Him now.
 - They are preparing for that great service in heaven where there will be no more sin at all.
 - Nevertheless, Paul makes it clear in verse 23 that sin receives its wages while eternal life is the free gift of God.
 - It is by grace that you are saved through faith...
 - So it is not by presenting yourself as servants to God that you earn eternal life...
 - but when God has chosen you for eternal life, He always makes you His servant...
 - And His servants are the ones who obey Him...
 - And they are the ones who begin to live in the eternal life that He has given them.

Conclusion: How thankful we should be that the LORD Jesus sanctifies us.

- Without this work, we would never be able to come into God’s presence, for He is a consuming fire.
 - He destroys whatever is not holy, but delights in what is holy.
 - We cannot possibly fit ourselves to come before Him, but we look to the LORD to work in us what He delights in...

- And we have His promise that He will do it...
- Eternal life is not merely living forever! It is living in holiness with God.